
Evaluation of Sunday Liturgy

St. Francis of Assisi Parish

Archdiocese of Cincinnati
Worship Office

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I. INTRODUCTION

The pastor and staff of St. Francis of Assisi parish asked the archdiocesan Worship Office to help them evaluate the way in which the parish celebrates Sunday Mass. This report compiles results of a survey offered to parish members, observations from visiting evaluators who attended Sunday Masses at the parish, and concerns surfaced by parish staff, worship commission, and pastoral council.

VISITING EVALUATORS

To conduct the evaluation of its Sunday Masses requested by St. Francis of Assisi parish, the Archdiocesan Worship Office enlisted the assistance of five professionals knowledgeable about liturgy in both theory and practice. These five individuals were each assigned to observe specific parish Sunday Masses at each of the Mass times between April 27 and May 26, 2013, which included the 5th and 6th Sundays of the Easter Season, Ascension, and Pentecost, as well as Trinity Sunday. A total of 11 services were attended by the visitors,¹ who filled out a lengthy questionnaire concerning each Mass they attended.

In this report, the visiting evaluators are designated by the abbreviation VE.

PARISHIONER SURVEYS

The opportunity to complete a survey was given to St. Francis of Assisi parishioners during the spring of 2013, with verbal announcements after Mass inviting people to pick one up in the gathering space.

Respondents

In total, the Worship Office received 299 surveys from St. Francis parishioners.² Those who completed the survey are fairly well distributed among the three Mass times, with slightly more parishioners who usually attend the 11:00 a.m. Mass. (See Table 1.)

Just over half of the respondents are women and about two-thirds are married. Table 2 contains more information.

Table 1. Usually attend this Mass.

Saturday 5:00 PM	32.7%	84
Sunday 8:30 AM	30.4%	78
Sunday 11:00 AM	37.0%	95
<i>answered question</i>		257
<i>skipped question</i>		42

Table 2. Sex and Marital Status.

Male	41.8%	118
Female	53.5%	151
Single	17.4%	49
Married	63.5%	179
Divorced	5.0%	14
Widowed	5.0%	14
<i>answered question</i>		282
<i>skipped question</i>		17

¹ The Saturday 5:00 pm Mass was observed 4 times, the Sunday 8:30 3 times, and the Sunday 11:00 4 times.

² The surveys were completed by hand on paper, and a volunteer for the Worship Office entered each (except for the comments) into Survey Monkey.

While the respondents are pretty evenly divided among the Mass times, in age they are quite skewed. At least 163 of 299 are over 60.³ (Since 25 forms did not have an answer for this question, the actual number could be even larger.) The next largest age category is 51-60, with 42 respondents. This makes at least **205 out of 299 respondents (75%) over age 50**. In contrast, there were 16 surveys handed in by teens or children (under age 18) and only 10 by young adults age 18 to 30.

Not surprisingly, given the age of most respondents, 204 of the respondents do not have children at home, while **only 22 parents of children under age 12 and 14 parents of teenagers completed the survey**. (20% of respondents elected not to answer this particular question, so the survey results could be weighed even more by “empty nesters.”)

It is beyond the scope of this current project to speculate why so many of the surveys were completed by older parishioners, but parish leaders should keep in mind when considering the results in this report that they are not hearing much about the concerns and needs of younger adults and of those still in the process of raising their children.

Given all this, special attention is given in this report, when possible, to the comments added in on the last page of the survey by the teens and adults under 50, since they are so underrepresented in the survey results.

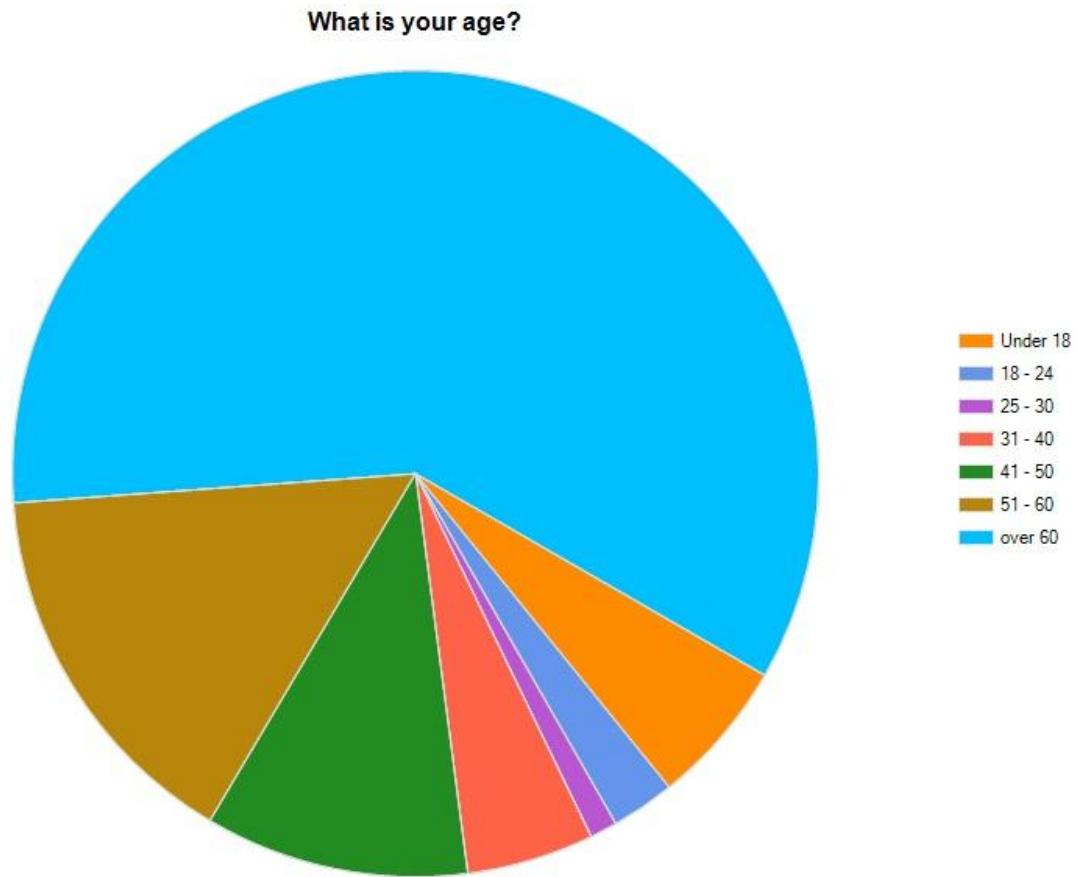
Table 3. Age.

Under 18	5.8%	16
18 - 24	2.6%	7
25 - 30	1.1%	3
31 - 40	5.1%	14
41 - 50	10.6%	29
51 - 60	15.3%	42
over 60	59.5%	163
<i>answered question</i>		257
<i>skipped question</i>		25

Table 4. Children at Home.

no children at home	85.0%	204
children under 12 years	9.2%	22
children 13 - 18 years	5.8%	14
<i>answered question</i>		240
<i>skipped question</i>		59

³ “Over 60” has the largest number of respondents but it is also the widest category. Other categories only measure five (age 25 to 30) to ten years, while this category includes those in their 60’s, 70’s, 80’s, 90’s.



II. THE LIVING CHURCH: GOD’S PEOPLE AND THE CHURCH BUILDING

HOSPITALITY AND WELCOME

When approaching the church property, drivers are guided by a sign near the road at both entrances⁴ that clearly identifies the name of the church. Times for the Sunday Masses, however, are not given. Entry to the church is easily accessible since there is no curb and no steps. The main entrance to the church seems fairly obvious, but there are no signs near the building indicating the location of offices or other rooms within the church structure. A few parishioners also pointed this out and asked for a map showing where rooms are located.

Once in the church, all of the VE experienced an environment of welcome and hospitality each time they came to St. Francis of Assisi. In every visit, they found the gathering space to be a place where people chatted and greeted one another as they entered.⁵

The parish makes an effort to be hospitable since ushers were present to welcome the VE as they came to Mass. On one occasion, the ushers seemed to be busy getting ready for something and did not acknowledge those arriving, but this was an exception. Some of the VE commented on being “warmly greeted” by ushers or being greeted by an usher as soon as they walked in. While the ushers welcomed worshippers at the main entrance, some of the VE noted that many people came in through the parish center doors or the back door near the Blessed Sacrament Chapel where there did not appear to be any ushers.

A place for parents with small children to worship while caring for their children was not evident to the V, and many assumed the gathering space was used for this purpose. Since this area is not arranged for parents to continue participating in the liturgy (can the sound from church be heard? are hymnals available?), the VE hoped that parents would just use the gathering space to settle their children and then return to the church.⁶

To most of the VE (9 of 11), the people arriving for Mass seemed genuinely happy to be there. At the first communion Masses in particular, there was a lot of friendly chatter among the families and a happy, joyful feeling as all gathered for Mass.

⁴ An older parishioner asks for “reflectors” to aid visibility along the sides of the driveways entering and exiting the parking lots, “since it is dark in winter when 5:00 Mass is over.”

⁵ One of evaluators found the amount of activities, displays, and sign-ups in the gathering space to be “kind of chaotic.”

⁶ One parishioner age 31-40 related her experience of encountering people who remain in the gathering space during the whole Mass instead of going inside the church. She said, “I find it disturbing to have entire families trying to participate while in the library when I take an upset child out the church.”

The friendly mood before Mass can sometimes, however, become a bit too noisy. The chatter before one of the first communion Masses continued, for instance, throughout the musical prelude. At other Masses, conversation from the sacristy could be heard in the body of the church before Mass began; people talking in the sacristy may not be aware how much their voices carry. As the time approached for Mass to begin, one of the VE noted, the level of noise carried in from the gathering space grew increasingly louder.

St. Francis parishioners agreed that an atmosphere of hospitality is created before Mass all or most of the time. A large majority said that when they arrive at church, ushers are present to welcome them. In the open comments at the end of the survey, several parishioners (including those under 18 and age 18-24) name the ministry of the ushers as a help to their prayer as a parish community.

For many parishioners of all age levels, the friendly community at St. Francis of Assisi is definitely an asset to their parish worship. When asked what helps them to be more involved in prayer at Mass, several of those under age 18 mentioned the “good community,” “seeing fellow parishioners,” and “very friendly environment.” Some of the 25-30 year-olds added, “The parish is welcoming” and “From the ministers to the attendees, everyone is very happy to be celebrating Mass together. It’s a very good environment.” A member in his 30’s said that the parish “felt like family from day 1.” Those over 60 also value the friendliness and warmth of the community; one said “Everyone makes you feel welcome.”

*“St Francis Parish
has become ‘home’
to our family and
we always feel at
peace when we are
here to pray and
celebrate Mass.”*

*-Parishioner, married
man, age 41-50*

It may be worth noting, given the few respondents under age 50, that, when asked on the last page of the survey what could be done to improve their parish's celebration of Sunday Mass, some parishioners in their 30's replied, "more people our age."

In contrast to the sense of hospitality, fewer parishioners feel that an atmosphere of prayer exists in the church before Mass begins.⁷ In their comments, some of the parishioners complained about the noise in church before Mass and asked for a period of quiet time in the church to allow them to prepare to celebrate the liturgy. One person aged 18-24 asked that the main body of the church be kept as “a place of prayer before and after Mass; that’s why we have a gathering space.”

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The parish would probably benefit from better signage that directs people to the various parts of the parish campus and the location of specific offices and rooms.
2. Keep the friendly atmosphere that prevails before Mass begins, but find a way to have at least a few minutes of quiet so that all can recollect themselves just before Mass starts. For example, have

⁷ Only 22% said a sense of prayer is always present before Mass begins, and 41% said most of the time, while a third of parishioners experience this seldom (11%) or only sometimes (22%).

someone invite the assembly to a period of quiet a few minutes before Mass begins. Perhaps brief announcements could be done at this time, ending with an invitation to silence.

3. Consider having outside decorations appropriate for the major liturgical seasons.

THE INTERIOR OF THE CHURCH

All of the VE agreed that the inside of the church has the feel of sacred space. It seems clean and orderly as well as adequately ventilated. The sanctuary is uncluttered and most VE thought the use of banners, plants, lighting, and flowers enhanced the main focal points of the church, although the placement of plants and flowers created for some a sense of a wall along the front of the sanctuary. Some of the VE thought the candles around the altar and sanctuary were too large for the area, especially in comparison to the Paschal Candle; the sanctuary candles are so tall that they overshadow the more important symbol of the Paschal Candle.

Most of the VE considered the church to be properly decorated for the liturgical season⁸. Different banners in the sanctuary marked the Sundays of the Easter season and the solemnities of Ascension and Pentecost. On Pentecost, however, a banner with the design of a large dove hung on the altar itself; it would be better to use the fabric's color or pattern to make an altar covering festive rather than illustrations.

Lighting

In their assessment of the lighting in the church, the VE were almost evenly divided. About half (5 of 11) thought that the lighting provides a pleasant and prayerful atmosphere and is adequate for people to see the print in the hymnals or worship aids (6 of 11), while half (5 of 11) found the lighting poor and inadequate.

A few of the VE commented positively on the natural light coming in over the sanctuary through the skylights.

One of the VE noticed the dark spots and dirty look of the ceiling, probably due to the lights. Several parishioners singled this out as well, asking for this to be remedied.⁹

Sound System

A priority for St. Francis of Assisi parish as a result of this evaluation process should be the repair or replacement of the sound system. This was clear from both the parishioners and the visitors.

⁸ One of the visitors thought more could have been done to highlight Pentecost.

⁹ Some of the parishioners wondered if the lights are too hot, and that is what is causing the black marks.

Only a few of the VE rated the sound system as adequate. The ministers that they could hear or not hear varied. Some of the VE thought the choir was too loud at times, making it difficult to understand the words they were singing. Others thought the priest's microphone was much louder than any other, while one could not hear the priest.¹⁰ Another could more easily hear and understand those who used the ambo, but found it was very difficult to hear and understand both the presider and deacon.

Besides the question of volume, the microphones intermittently stop functioning. During the final blessing at one Mass, for instance, the priest's microphone cut in and out repeatedly every few words, which was quite disruptive to any sense of prayer.

In an attempt to determine the source of the sound problems, some of the VE concluded that the adequacy of the sound system depends on where one sits, observing that the sound was better on the far right side than in the back on the right. One visitor wondered if the size of the speakers could be part of the difficulty since they seemed small for such a large space.

Among suggestions for improvement given on the parishioners' surveys, the sound system ranked as one of the most commonly cited difficulties for parish worship. Over and over again, parishioners of all age levels asked for something to be about the sound system. Of just a handful of surveys from those under age 18, for instance, several write in the sound system as an area needing improvement.

Only 22% of parishioners agreed that "The public address system projects clearly the voices of those who are speaking at the microphone, and it is easy to understand what is being said." A third of respondents can hear and understand most of the time, but even more (40%) say they can easily hear over the microphones seldom or only sometimes. (Given the generally positive responses from parishioners on the questionnaire, these numbers are informative, even without the repeated written-in comments on the last page.)

Like the visitors, the complaints about the volume are not consistent. Some ask for the volume to be reduced because there is "so much echo ... Louder is not always better!" "Kindly turn down the volume." Yet some others ask for higher volume; the sound, one parishioner says, "could be louder; I can't hear when children are crying."

A number of parishioners find a problem with the microphone at the ambo. They find it hard to hear the lectors and many think that the microphone requires the lectors to make precise adjustments that not all lectors know how to do. "The microphone for lectors doesn't catch the speaker well and is hard to adjust to the right level." "The mic at the ambo has to be positioned perfectly, the speaker has to project and stand close to mic." An older member recalls that the ambo microphone has never worked properly, "not since church was built."

¹⁰ From the visitor reports, it seems that the comments about a loud presider's microphone were from Masses with Fr. Schmidt and those who complained about not being able to hear the presider were at Masses with Fr. Gaeke.

In addition to the ambo microphone, some parishioners say from their experience that the “mic at lectern used by commentator is very poor.”

Like the visitors' experience, some respondents claim there are "dead spots" of the church where the sound is problematic. Some say that the "right side opposite choir is difficult to hear." One parishioner detects an “imbalance in the sound system. It is very strong in the choir area and very weak in the north and northwest areas, almost as if the sound is being received ‘indirectly’ after bouncing off the walls.” An usher thinks the echoes occur less frequently in the back row. Several parishioners describe sound problems when there is a baptism during Mass. In the gathering space around the font, some find it difficult to hear, while others point out that those who choose to remain in the church cannot hear. Generally, some parishioners describe the sound system as “unpredictable” and “inconsistent.” “The sound is still terrible and takes away so much” from Mass, said one respondent. Another went a step further: “it is now below terrible.” One respondent captured the gist of many surveys; in listing the top three concerns about liturgy, this person wrote "the sound system" three times. The situation so clearly needs attention that some parishioners estimated that many members of St. Francis would donate to help fund a new sound system.

Seating

All of the VE were able to sit comfortably in the pews, and most could stand or kneel comfortably (9 of 11 and 8 of 11). All the VE agreed that the arrangement of the church interior allows the entire assembly to see the priest clearly when he is at the presider's chair. This is also the consensus of the parishioners: 74% of parish respondents say they can always see the priest at the chair, and another 20% say they can see him there most of the time.

Liturgical Books and Vessels

St. Francis's liturgical books, including the Lectionary, Book of the Gospels, and Roman Missal, as well as the communion vessels appeared to the VE to be of good quality and in good condition.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Make it a top priority to repair or replace the sound system. Engage professional assistance.
2. Repair the dark spots on the ceiling and determine if the lights are too hot or too close to the ceiling.
3. Avoid using banners on the altar that have depictions.
4. Have a Paschal candle that is larger than the altar candles.
5. Decorate the sanctuary area in such a way that a barrier is not created between it and the assembly.

THE ASSEMBLY

The parishioners who gathered for worship seemed to the VE to be at ease with and friendly toward one another. Most (9 of 11) of the VE observed members of the assembly greeting one another informally before Mass began, and half (6 of 11) found them to be welcoming and hospitable to strangers.

Latecomers do not seem to be an issue for the parish, at least in the experience of the VE. About half of the VE noticed people arriving late for Mass, but this was usually only a small number.

Participation

One of the strengths of St. Francis of Assisi parish is the high level of participation in the liturgy by the assembly. Every one of the VE at every Mass they attended found that the assembly participated well in responding to spoken responses and prayers and in singing the hymns and responses. "For the most part, the members of the assembly are very much engaged in the action of the liturgy, especially the singing," said one of the VE. "I was pleasantly surprised that the assembly responded as well as they did to the prayers and singing. They seemed quite engaged in the liturgy." Even at a first communion Mass with a large number of visitors present, the level of participation in speaking and singing remained very high.

In particular, the assembly's singing prompted almost all of the VE to write in additional comments on their questionnaire. "The assembly sings very well. I am impressed by how well most of them are willing to enter the music." "Great participation by the assembly - and for an early Mass it was even better!" "The assembly sings very well, even at 8:30am!" "Everyone around me was singing." "I was amazed at how well they sang."

During the Scripture readings the congregation listened attentively and most of them did not follow along by reading the texts in the missalettes, according to most of the VE. At one Mass, one of the VE noticed a large number of people reading along while the text was being proclaimed, and wondered if this were due to the problems with the sound system. At another Mass, however, the same VE saw only a few reading along, despite the fact that the first reader was very difficult to hear.

Parishioners were somewhat less generous in their assessment of the assembly's participation in the Mass. When asked if "the people actively participate in spoken word, song, and listening," only a third said this is always true, and half agreed most of the time. This still conveys the positive picture that the parishioners have of themselves as a participating liturgical assembly, but is not as strong as the VE's impression. Perhaps those who responded to the survey have high expectations regarding participation and wish the parish to grow in this even more.

"I love the way the congregation is focused on the Mass and the prayers. All around me people sing and respond to the prayers. This helps me to feel a part of this Eucharistic celebration."
--Parishioner, over 60

For many parishioners, the community's participation in the liturgy is one of the things that help them to pray. Among positive aspects of the parish worship two parishioners in their 40's cited "Involvement of whole congregation in the Mass" and "We fully participate, as a parish, at Mass."

LAY LITURGICAL MINISTERS

Ushers

Ushers were present before Mass to greet the people at the main entrance at the Masses attended by the VE. Parishioners also find ushers there to welcome people as they enter church, with 87% of respondents agreeing this is true all or most of the time.

The ushers were dressed appropriately and easily identifiable. They were friendly and welcoming in the experience of the V, but less than half of the VE described them as helpful. Some of the VE noticed the ushers at some Masses just standing around the font chatting with people they seemed to know and not reaching out to others. In contrast, at one of the crowded first communion Masses, ushers were very helpful in assisting people to find seats during the Gloria in a discreet, unobtrusive way.

From where the VE were seated during Mass, they were unable to tell if the ushers joined in prayer one the liturgy began. When the Mass was over, ushers diligently went to each pew to put missalettes back in place and to straighten up the other worship aids.

Among the positive aspects that they see in their parish worship, a parishioner under age 18 named "happy greeters / ushers."

Altar Servers

A combination of boys and girls assisted as altar servers at the Masses attended by the VE. Almost all of the VE considered the servers to be reverent and prayerful, well-prepared and comfortable in their ministry, and 94% of parishioners agreed that the servers are well-trained and reverent during Mass all or most of the time.

The servers always wore liturgical garb, but the VE called this vesture "neat" only half of the time (5 of 11). Some of the VE thought the albs worn by the servers were not nearly long enough. Two VE were impressed by the servers' participation in the Mass: "The servers even joined in the singing!"

Lectors

The first two readings were proclaimed by different lectors (as Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass recommends¹¹) at all the Masses attended by the VE. All of the lectors were adults except for one

¹¹ Lectionary for Mass, Introduction n. 52: "... Whenever there is more than one reading, it is better to assign the readings to different readers, if available."

youth, and included both men and women. They sat with the assembly and each came forward to the ambo at the proper time, pausing to bow in reverence to the altar.

In the estimation of the V, almost all the lectors were appropriately dressed. Regarding their proclamation of the text, the VE thought about two-thirds of the lectors read with expression and seemed to understand the meaning of the reading, but less than half read with conviction and about one-fourth had good eye contact with the assembly.

Parishioners said that "the lectors are well prepared and read with expression" most of the time (47%) or all the time (38%). While these numbers combined indicate that 85% of respondents think that the lectors are usually doing a good job, it may be helpful to compare parishioner responses to other ministries. For instance, the statement about ushers doing their ministry well received "always" 69% and extraordinary ministers of holy communion 72%. In light of these numbers, the 38% "always" for lectors seems low.

As was mentioned above in the section about the sound system, it appears that not all lectors know how to use the microphone properly. A number of parishioners wrote in comments about a problem with the lectors positioning the microphone and some of the VE did too: "She was very difficult to hear! She should have adjusted the mic to move it right in front of her face. As it was, it was higher than her mouth and so we didn't hear much." "The lector was not loud enough; maybe he was back from the mic too far." "I could not hear the first one but could clearly hear that second reader."

Results of the evaluation by both the VE and parishioners agree that the lectors' ministry could be improved and the lectors would benefit from further training. The training should focus on the actual proclamation of the text; the lectors generally seem to be fine in what they do before and after reading, e.g. acting in a reverent manner or dressing appropriately.

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion

Respondents to the parishioner survey rated the communion ministers very highly, with 98% agreeing that "the ministers of communion are reverent and attentive to each person" always (72%) or most of the time (26%). All of the VE concurred about reverence, and most (8 of 11) thought they were attentive to each person they served.

The Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion were organized, said most of the V, but several (4 of 11) observed that some of the communion ministers did not seem to know where to stand. All of the extraordinary ministers used the proper words ("The Body of Christ," "The Blood of Christ").

All of the VE thought the Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion were dressed appropriately at the Masses they attended, but some parishioners criticized the clothing of some communion ministers as being too casual.¹²

¹² Specifically, some objected to jeans, sweatshirts, and short skirts.

Lay Ministers in General

When asked if the lay ministers were representative of the assembly, all of the VE agreed regarding age, most agreed regarding gender, and only a few agreed regarding race. Parishioners thought that people of various age levels are involved in the Mass in appropriate ways all the time (51%) or most of the time (39%). The response by parishioners was similar for the statement about whether the liturgical ministers represent a good cross section¹³ of the parish: 51% said "always" and 36% said "most of the time." More parishioners agreed that the parish has a good balance of men and women in various liturgical ministries: 69% said "always" and 28% said "most of the time."

The parishioners were generally pleased with how lay liturgical ministers dress; 9 out of 10 respondents said that all liturgical ministers dress neatly and with care.

One of the VE who attended three different Masses noticed that all the ushers at each of these Masses were men and wondered if there are any women or young people serving as ushers. Some VE noticed very few young adults among the lectors and communion ministers. Younger people were mostly represented by the teen and pre-teen altar servers, and a few choir members.

"Reverent priest, great choir, excellent lectors, wonderful ushers and servers – all of the above come together to form this beautiful liturgy."

- Parishioner, over age 60

While the lay ministers did not include those who were physically impaired when the VE were present, there was frequently a signer for the hearing impaired. During at least one Mass, the whole assembly was invited to join the deaf in signing "Alleluia" when singing the gospel acclamation.

"For the most part," one of the VE said, "I thought all the ministers were reverent and knew what do to do." Other VE concurred: "The lay ministers seemed to be well prepared and carried out their ministry effectively." "Overall, the liturgical ministers seemed well-trained and prepared for their ministry."

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Provide further training for lectors to improve their proclamation of the Scripture readings.
2. Allow and encourage women and young people to serve as ushers.
3. Encourage the ushers to be more attentive to people as they arrive.
4. Provide albs for servers that are long enough, as well as clean and unwrinkled.
5. Recruit more young parishioners to serve in all the lay liturgical ministries.

¹³ One parishioner suggested that parish members make a concerted effort to reach out to "involve Hispanics and Rwandans in the parish by personal invitation."

ORDAINED MINISTERS

Of the 11 Masses attended by the V, Fr. Tom Schmidt, the pastor, presided at 8 and was observed by 4 of the 5 VE. Fr. Tom Gaeke presided at 3, observed by 2 VE. The visitors' questionnaire contained four questions near the beginning about general characteristics of the priest in his role of presider, and additional questions later about particular parts of the Mass.

A deacon assisted at half of the Masses observed by the VE (6 of 11). On four of these occasions Chris Rauch served as deacon, and Mark Stasiak was observed twice. Deacon Jack Pitts did not happen to diaconate at any of the Masses attended by the VE.

There were two versions of the parishioner survey. Initially, the survey posed questions generally about the priests and deacons. Later, the survey was revised to have respondents specify which priest or deacon they were speaking about. Among those which specified the priest being evaluated, 130 parishioners answered regarding Fr. Schmidt and 29 answered regarding Fr. Gaeke. Around 40 parishioners evaluated Deacon Mark Stasiak and around 100 Deacon Jack Pitts.¹⁴ Chris Rauch was not included on the parishioner survey.

Of the 299 parishioner surveys, there are 86 of the first version that did not have the chance to respond about specific priests and deacons. These responses were compiled separately and are not used in the section below on individual clergy. Another 55 respondents chose not to answer any of the questions about the priests and 75 elected not to respond about deacons.

In addition to the particular questions posed on the survey, all respondents, regardless of whether they were able to specify which priest they were discussing, were invited to write in comments at the end of the survey, and a number of these, as might be expected, concerned the clergy.

In the sections below, parishioners' responses to particular questions are taken from the second version of the survey where a certain priest or deacon is named, unless otherwise noted. Comments are included from both versions.

Father Tom Schmidt

From their observation of Fr. Schmidt presiding at Mass, all of the VE described him as inviting, confident, and reverent. Several (5 of 8) also described the way he presided as engaging. Of the possible words given on the VE's form, none chose "hurried," "affected," "indifferent," or "unsure."

¹⁴ On the revised survey, 33 said in #41 that they were evaluating Deacon Stasiak, but in fact the following questions about him (#42-46) were answered by 40 to 44 respondents. 105 said they were evaluating Deacon Pitts, but questions about him (#48-52) were actually answered by 97 to 101 people.

Fr. Schmidt was dressed in vestments that were appropriate, clean, and of good quality. He helped to create an atmosphere of the sacred, according to most of the VE (7 of 8).

Most of the VE thought that Fr. Schmidt drew attention to the rite being celebrated rather than to himself. "He seems very dedicated to his liturgical ministry. He is careful to look at all sections of the church and take everyone in, and is very deliberate in his speaking and movements," said one of the VE. Another added, "Fr. Tom is concerned with celebrating the rite well and helping people to understand what we are doing."

His pastoral concern to draw the people into the liturgy and understand what they do may be what leads him to insert additional comments into the liturgy. While the intent is good, these efforts at liturgical catechesis sometimes interrupted the flow of the liturgy and detracted from the rite, in the opinion of some of the VE. "The rhythm of the liturgy seemed to drag - too many extra words." As a result, only half of the VE who observed him thought that Fr. Schmidt helped the liturgy to flow at a good pace.

Most of the VE who observed Fr. Schmidt thought that he proclaimed the prayers in an unaffected or genuine tone.

At one of the Masses, the baptism of a child was celebrated. The VE who attended this Mass thought that during this part of the liturgy, Fr. Schmidt appeared rather disorganized. (See p. 42 for more about the celebration of baptism at Mass.)

Parishioners rated Fr. Schmidt's presiding at Mass very highly. Over 78% always perceive a sense of reverence in him when he presides at Mass, and another 14% agree this is so most of the time. Several of the write-in comments on what pleases them about their parish liturgy noted Fr. Schmidt's reverence at Mass. Parishioners think he speaks clearly and with expression ("always" 76%, "most of the time" 17%), and seems prepared for the liturgy ("always" 79%, "most of the time" 17%).¹⁵

A parishioner in her 40's admires Fr. Schmidt's authenticity in presiding: "Father Tom celebrates the Mass with all of us. He is not up there going through the motions." Other comments about Fr. Schmidt include: "Fr. Tom Schmidt is inspiring," (under 18) "Father is very kind," (25-30) and "Fr. Tom is one of the best priests I have ever had contact with. He is a good, caring, holy man. He is compassionate We are blessed to have him as our pastor" (over 60).

"St. Francis has become part of my life unlike any other Catholic Church I have ever attended. The church has a very welcoming community, a very approachable staff, and a priest that not only has his door open to everyone but he truly is involved with his church community."
--Parishioner, woman, age 51-60

While parishioners judged Fr. Schmidt's presiding very positively, their responses to the four questions on their survey about preaching were also generally affirmative but less so. On whether Fr. Schmidt's

¹⁵ If the responses for "always" and "most of the time" are combined, the parishioners' positive assessment of Fr. Schmidt's presiding is strikingly high: reverence 92%, speaks with expression 93%, is prepared 95%.

homilies are based on the Scripture texts of the day, only 42% agreed "always" and another 42% said "most of the time." On whether his homilies address current issues and life problems in light of the readings, 36% agreed "always," 32% "most of the time," with 22% "sometimes" and 10% "seldom." Half of those who evaluated Fr. Schmidt said that he speaks on their level and that they can understand his message, but over one-fifth said this is so sometimes, seldom, or never. Compared to the very high responses on his presiding, it seems the parishioners have some important feedback here about how they perceive Fr. Schmidt's preaching, especially on the following matter.

The last of the four survey questions concerned the length of Fr. Schmidt's homilies. Here the responses are very different from others. On whether the length of his homilies seems appropriate, the largest response is 29% saying "seldom" with another 21% saying "sometimes" and 11% (13 of 122) saying "never." This is the largest number of "never" responses on the whole survey. Parishioners hardly ever chose the "never" answer,¹⁶ so this is clearly a concern of theirs.

As is evident from the written-in comments on the survey's last page, the concern is that the homilies are too long. Of seven surveys from 18-24 year-olds, two asked for shorter homilies from Fr. Schmidt. From 14 surveys by those under age 18, when asked what would improve their parish worship, almost half (6 of 14) wrote in that they think the homilies are too long.

Many surveys from all the other age groups also singled out the length of Fr. Schmidt's homilies as a concern. They suggest that he offer fewer examples or illustrations, and that the homily be less repetitive. They think Father has too many points, and many say that "he loses us" among all the various points being made. "I would rather hear something short that stays with me than something long that loses me and leaves me with nothing for the week" (woman, age 41-50).

In spite of concern about length, very many parishioners took time to commend Fr. Schmidt's preaching. "Fr. Tom is a wonderful homilist," and "I love Fr. Tom S.'s homilies," said some parishioners in their 30's. "Fr. Schmidt's homilies carry me through the whole week. I love them" (over 60). "Although I complain about the length of Mass, I do love Fr. Tom's homilies. He has a magical way of making me see clearly" (woman, married, age 51-60).

In general, what many parishioners say in their comments is that Fr. Schmidt's homilies are good, but too long. "The content is excellent. But 2 or 3 illustrations are enough. And one point is enough" (woman, married, over 60). This comment from someone in their 50's sums up the opinion of many: "I love listening to Fr. Tom Schmidt's sermons. Very interesting sermons, but sometimes too lengthy."

Some attribute the long homilies to his "excitement" and good intentions of "wanting to share the exuberance of his faith" (woman, married, age 41-50). "It seems Father tries very hard to prepare his message – you can tell he takes the time to plan," said a parishioner in his 40's. "The problem is, I think

¹⁶ The only other questions where "never" was chosen by more than a few were #6 and #25 on whether there is an opportunity to pray before or after Mass. On # 6 (an atmosphere of prayer before Mass) 3% said never (9 of 276) and also on #25 (can remain in church after and pray undisturbed) (9 of 276). Here 13 of 122 said the length of Fr. Schmidt's homilies is never appropriate.

he tries too hard to say too much – and the message gets lost. ... Focus on one main point." Because of this, some parishioners suggest that Fr. Schmidt could use "an editor." Perhaps Fr. Schmidt could take this suggestion and enlist some parishioners whom he trusts to help him select which material to retain and what to omit so that his homilies may come to a more reasonable length.

Members of St. Francis of Assisi in general appreciate their pastor's preaching. Their love and admiration shine forth in their comments. But they are clearly asking for shorter, more focused preaching, with limited examples and one main point that they can remember and take home.

Father Tom Gaeke

Two VE observed Fr. Gaeke on three occasions. While one selected the terms "confident" and "reverent" to describe his presiding at Mass, the other chose only "indifferent." Neither opted for any of the following terms: "engaging," "inviting," "inspiring;" nor did they choose "hurried," "affected," or "unsure."

"It was my experience that the presider drew attention to neither himself nor the liturgy," said one of the VE. "He seemed to have very low energy -- perhaps he was not feeling well that day. He is not very engaging in the liturgy."

Fr. Gaeke was dressed in vestments that were appropriate, clean, and of good quality. As he presided at Mass, Fr. Gaeke "clearly knew what he was doing," said a V, but "he seemed to just do the liturgical actions in a perfunctory manner with little thought or energy which didn't allow the assembly to enter into the mystery being celebrated." One of the two VE thought that Fr. Gaeke proclaimed the prayers in an affected or artificial tone.

In contrast, parishioners seemed happy with Fr. Gaeke's presiding, on the areas covered on the survey. Twenty-eight people answered the question on the parishioners' survey on whether Fr. Gaeke has a sense of reverence when he presides at Mass, and all 28 agreed that he does always (82%) or most of the time (18%). They say that he speaks clearly and with expression (75% "always," 21% "most of the time") and that he seems prepared for the liturgy (82% "always," 18% "most of the time").

On whether Fr. Gaeke's homilies are based on the Scripture texts of the day, 79% agreed "always" and another 12% said "most of the time." His homilies address current issues and life problems in light of the readings, say 25 of the 28 parishioners who answered this question (89%), and most agreed that he speaks on their level and that they can understand his message (85% "always" and 11% "most of the time"). The length of his homilies seems appropriate to 24 of the 28 (86%).

Some of the write-in comments reflected this satisfaction with Fr. Gaeke's preaching. "When we see Father Tom Gaeke as celebrant we know we will have a good message to take home," said a parishioner in their 50's. "Fr. Gaeke's homilies are short and easy to remember with a line or two I carry with me all week" (woman, married, over 60).

Deacon Mark Stasiak

During the weeks in which the VE attended Mass at St. Francis, two of the VE participated in Masses at which Mark Stasiak served as deacon. The second version of the parishioner survey contained six questions about the deacons; four of these specifically concern their preaching. (Neither of the VE heard Deacon Stasiak preach.) Between 33 to 44 parishioners responded to the questions regarding Deacon Stasiak. This section on Deacon Stasiak is drawn from both the VE and input from a small number of parishioners.

Deacon Stasiak performed the liturgical duties of a deacon, the VE observed, by carrying the Gospel Book in the entrance procession, proclaiming the Gospel, reading the intercessions, and preparing the altar. One of the VE thought he read the gospel with expression, conviction, and understanding, and had good eye contact with the assembly, but the other VE out of this list chose only that he read with understanding. After the "high energy" of the gospel acclamation from the Mass of Glory, this VE said, Deacon Stasiak's reading of the gospel seemed rather "flat" in comparison.

At one of the Masses, the VE found it very difficult to hear both the presider and deacon at their chairs: "it was very hard to hear the General Intercessions read by the deacon and there was little expression in his reading of them." He also thought Deacon Stasiak read the intercessions too rapidly. In contrast, on a different occasion, the VE noted that Deacon Stasiak read the intercessions clearly and with expression.

Both of the VE considered Deacon Stasiak to be reverent and prayerful in his role, as well as appearing comfortable in his ministry.

In reflecting on Deacon Stasiak's liturgical ministry, most respondents to this part of the parish survey considered that he seems prepared for his role all (68%, or 30 of 44) or most of the time (27%, or 12 of 44).

About half (21 of 40) say that he always speaks clearly and with expression, with a fifth agreeing this is so most of the time. However, another fifth (8 of 40) say he speaks clearly and with expression only sometimes, and 3 of 40 answered "seldom" or "never." Since the parishioners rarely selected these options, it seems significant to note that over a third of parishioners who answered this question find that Deacon Stasiak usually does not speak clearly and with expression.

*"The priests and
deacons are joyful
in their ministry.
This joy radiates
out to the
congregation."
--parishioner,
single man, 41-50*

When he preaches at Mass, Deacon Stasiak always bases his homily on the Scripture texts of the day, in the experience of almost two-thirds of the respondents (22 of 34),¹⁷ with another one-fourth agreeing most of the time. Fewer judge that he addresses the current issues and life problems in light of those

¹⁷ These numbers differ from those on the Survey Monkey for parishioners, Part I. For the preaching questions on the second version of parishioner survey, the results contain an "NA" option, which skews the percentages. These totals and percentages were recalculated eliminating the NA responses, and including only those which actually answered the questions on Deacon Stasiak's preaching.

readings: 33% agree always, 31% most of the time, 36% sometimes or seldom. Half of the respondents, again, find that Deacon Stasiak always speaks on their level and they can always understand his message. Another 29% agree most of the time. On whether the length of his homilies seems appropriate, 35% say "always," 41% "most of the time" and 20% "sometimes." (The survey did not specify whether this means parishioners think his homilies are too long or too short.)

Based on this feedback from parishioners, perhaps Deacon Stasiak could work on incorporating more expression into his speaking and proclaiming the gospel, as well as addressing current issues and life problems in his homilies.

Deacon Jack Pitts

None of the VE attended a Mass at which Deacon Jack Pitts ministered, so the following is based on parishioner surveys, of which about 100 answered questions regarding Deacon Pitts.

Of the 101 parishioners who answered this question, 99 thought that Deacon Pitts seems prepared for the liturgy either always (77, 76%) or most of the time (22, 22%). About half of them say that he always speaks clearly and with expression, and an additional 40% agree most of the time.

With regard to his preaching, nearly all of the respondents say that Deacon Pitts bases his homily on the Scripture texts of the day all of (60 of 97, 62%) or most of the time (35 of 97, 36%). Fewer agree he always addresses the current issues and life problems in light of the readings, but there is still high agreement: 50% marked "always" and 44% "most of the time."

For the statement "Deacon Jack speaks on my level and I can understand his message," 62% agree always and 29% most of the time. The lowest "always" score for Deacon Pitts appeared on the question asking whether the length of his homilies seems appropriate: 43% "always," 40% "most of the time," 14% "sometimes." Given the very high numbers on the other questions about Deacon Pitts, it would seem that the parishioners are telling him something here. (Again, the survey question does not specify whether his homilies are too long or too short, and written-in comments shed no light on this, but it would be easy for Deacon Pitts to ascertain which they mean.)

Respondents seem happy with Deacon Pitts' diaconal ministry. Besides adjusting the length of his homilies, Deacon Pitts could work to improve speaking clearly and with expression, and to more strongly address in his homilies current issues and life problems in light of the readings.

Deacon Chris Rauch

During the weeks in which this evaluation was conducted, Chris Rauch was ordained to the diaconate for St. Francis of Assisi parish and began serving as deacon at Mass. Three of the VE observed him on four occasions. Because the parishioner survey was prepared in advance of his ordination and the parishioners had no experience of him yet in that ministerial role, questions about Deacon Rauch were not included on their questionnaire, so this summary is based only on the visitors' assessment.

Deacon Rauch carried out the roles proper to the deacons: he carried the Gospel Book in the entrance procession, proclaimed the Gospel, read the intercessions, and prepared the altar. In the opinion of the V, he read the gospel with expression, conviction, and understanding, and he also maintained good eye contact with the assembly. He read the intercessions clearly and with expression, and prepared the altar expediently and with reverence. Overall, the VE described Deacon Rauch as attentive and comfortable in his ministry, while remaining reverent and prayerful. "This was Chris Rauch's first Mass as a deacon and he was excellent," said one of the VE. "He had great poise, knew what he was doing, and did not draw attention to himself."

A Note about Preaching

It is worth noting, in addition to the particular points discussed above, that many parishioners included positive comments about the preaching that they experience regularly at St. Francis. All age levels mention homilies as one of the aspects of parish liturgy that pleases them. Some younger parishioners, for instance, say they can find at St. Francis "Homilies relevant to today's society" (age 18-24), "Good homilies that I can relate to my life" (age 25-30), and "Engaging homilies with real examples of how we can live as Jesus's followers today" (age 31-40).

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. When he presides, Fr. Schmidt should limit the additional words he adds into the liturgy.
2. Fr. Schmidt should shorten his homilies to about 8 minutes. He may find it helpful to enlist the advice of a few parishioners who can assist him with this.
3. Fr. Gaeke should try to speak with more expression and to be more engaged with the assembly.
4. Deacon Stasiak should work on incorporating more expression into his speaking and proclaiming the gospel.
5. Deacon Pitts should keep his homilies to an appropriate length, 8-10 minutes.

MUSIC and MUSIC MINISTRY

As discussed above in the section on the assembly as a whole, the VE were quite impressed with the high level of participation in the Mass by the congregation. Liturgical music at St. Francis of Assisi plays a significant role in promoting and sustaining this participation; the VE were unanimous in their opinion that the music used at the Masses they attended encouraged the participation of the assembly.

Parishioners, however, were slightly more reticent about this. Only half of them said the music at Mass always helps them to pray as a community, but another third agreed most of the time.

In addition to their judgment about participation, most (10 of 11) thought the music was performed well. There was somewhat less agreement among the VE on some other points. About three-fourths (8 of 11) thought the music was of good quality and was based on sound theological and liturgical principles. About half (6 of 11) considered the music to have enhanced the liturgical season.

Repertoire

The hesitation for some of the VE about the quality of the music and the soundness of its theology lies in the parish's predominant choice of "contemporary" songs. "All of the music was contemporary in nature," said one of the V, "meaning that not a hymn was sung." Another had a similar experience: "All the songs were 'contemporary' in style. I would have liked singing at least one hymn." Yet another wondered "if they ever use a sung-through composition of a hymn instead of contemporary music."¹⁸

The concern here is not only about style but also, even more importantly, theological content. One of the VE put it this way: "St. Francis has an excellent music ministry. However, I think that the repertoire chosen is all of the same genre -- there is little to no traditional hymnody. Everything seems to be contemporary 70's and 80's music. It would be good to expand to the breadth of repertoire that is available, especially looking at hymn texts with stronger theology. [Contemporary music has] a lot of horizontal theology, and not a lot of vertical -- giving praise to God. This would be an important step to give the music more depth." Another affirmed, "The people sang well, but I wonder about the quality of the theology over the long-run."

Liturgical Feasts and Seasons

The reservations expressed among nearly half of the VE over whether the music enhanced the liturgical season were based on the particular choices made for the Masses they attended during the end of the Easter Season, including Ascension of the Lord and Pentecost, followed by Trinity Sunday.

For instance, at one of the first communion Masses, the VE thought that musical selections focused on first communion and overshadowed the Easter Season. On the Ascension, standard contemporary

¹⁸ An evaluator who returned for a subsequent visit was pleased to discover hymns being used then. "It was nice to see they used two hymns this weekend as opposed to none the previous week."

songs like "Now We Remain" and "Be Not Afraid" were used instead of hymns that celebrate the mystery of that particular day. The closing for Ascension was indeed a hymn ("Alleluia! Alleluia!" tune: Ode to Joy) but the words were about Easter and said nothing about the Ascension. Similarly, on Pentecost, a major solemnity, only the entrance song highlighted the day, with the other songs being more general or even associated with another season.¹⁹ On Trinity Sunday, the VE questioned how certain songs related to the liturgical action or to the solemnity ("Sacred Silence" for the Preparation of the Gifts and "Rain Down" for Communion).

Choirs

A choir assisted in leading the people in song at all but one of the Masses visited by the evaluators. During their visits, the evaluators experienced a variety of choirs: all men, all women, mixed, small and large, middle-aged with some young members, all young adults. The parish is to be commended for offering these opportunities for members to become involved and for making such an effort to provide musical leadership at liturgy. All of the descriptors selected by the VE for the choirs were positive; the singing of the different choirs was judged to be pleasant (10 of 10), confident (10 of 10), strong (9 of 10), and inviting (8 of 10).²⁰ "Excellent choir director and choir," said one.²¹

At all the Masses the VE judged there to be a good balance between cantor or choir and assembly in singing. The only exception was one VE's experience during the singing of the Gloria, when no number was announced and it was difficult for the assembly to know which setting to sing. "With the Gloria, very few members of the assembly sang since the choir was singing it and doing such a great job. I got the impression that they shouldn't sing along with the choir but just listen." "When the choir is singing, the assembly shies away from singing along."

Most parishioners think that there is good balance between congregational singing and singing by the choir either always (52%) or most of the time (37%). "The choir leads and encourages the parish to sing," said one parishioner. "They don't just put on their own show." A few parishioners and one of the visitors noticed that some choir members draw attention to themselves when singing by movement or looking at the congregation "as if performing"; they asked that the choirs keep their eyes on the director. Many parishioners of all ages included the parish choirs on the last page of the survey among aspects of the liturgy that help them to pray. "The choir is very good," said a parishioner, "with great songs that lift the spirit."

¹⁹ The Entrance was "One Spirit, One Church" with a contemporary Come, Holy Ghost as a refrain. The Preparation of the Gifts and Communion were "We Have Been Told" and "Be Not Afraid." The Closing was "Lord of Glory" which is associated with Advent.

²⁰ One of the V, who complimented the choir as being very good and "doing a great ministry," suggested that the choir he heard at 11:00 "work a little more on each voice listening to each other as opposed to just belting out a note" and "learning to blend." Another noted that it was difficult to understand the words

²¹ Two suggestions regarding the choirs' singing were offered by the V. One of the V, who complimented the choir as being very good and "doing a great ministry," suggested that the choir he heard "work a little more on each voice listening to each other as opposed to just belting out a note" and "learning to blend." Another noted that it was difficult to understand the words of the prelude sung by the choir, so they might also work on their diction and enunciating more clearly.

Cantors

A member of the choir usually served as psalmist, coming to the ambo to lead the responsorial psalm between the readings. Sometimes this person and sometimes others helped to lead the congregation in singing hymns and responses. For instance, some of the responses were led by the music director, while earlier two men other than the psalmist led the Gloria.

In describing the singing of these various cantors, the VE chose the following: "pleasant" (8 of 8), "confident" (7 of 8), and "inviting" (6 of 8). However, only half of the VE said the cantor's singing was strong. (None chose "unpleasant," "unsure," "weak," or "uninviting.")

Parishioners said that there is a cantor or leader of song at Mass all (80%) or most of the time (17%).

Accompanist / Music Director

Similarly, the VE considered the accompanist to be competent in her ministry (11 of 11), providing strong but not overpowering music leadership (10 of 11). With the exception of only one Mass in which the visitor thought she was preoccupied with the music and inattentive to the liturgical action and prayer, the VE found her to be reverent and prayerful throughout the liturgy. Most of the time, the accompanist played the piano; some of the VE suggested the organ be used more frequently.

Sometimes the accompanist directed the singing of the assembly with hand gestures, either from the piano bench or standing when the singing was a cappella. Some of the VE thought this was unnecessary, since the assembly would have known what to do without the direction. Instead of helping the community to focus on their sung prayer, the conducting seemed to detract from the prayer of the assembly and draw attention more to the director.

Other Instruments

In addition to the piano, quite a few other instruments were played to add beauty to the liturgical music. Among those that the VE experienced during the weeks they visited were trumpet, guitar, clarinet, French horn, recorder, and drums. The VE thought these instrumentalists were competent in their ministry (8 of 8), providing strong but not overpowering music leadership (7 of 8). They were reverent and prayerful throughout the liturgy, and paid attention to the community's prayer (6 of 8).

Music Resources

The *Breaking Bread* books were of good quality and did not seem, for the most part, to be in need of replacement or repair. Where most of the VE sat, there were a sufficient number of *Breaking Bread* books for the people in that area. However, for one of the VE there were only two missalettes for the whole pew, and some parishioners as well indicated on their surveys the need for more copies of the missalettes and music resources in the pews.

Regarding the contents of *Breaking Bread*, however, only 7 of the 11 VE could say that this resource generally contained music based on sound liturgical principles and theological principles, reflecting the concerns discussed above regarding the use of nearly all contemporary songs.

Hymn Board

At present, the parish has the custom of announcing the hymn numbers. Some of the VE suggested using hymn boards or worship aids in order to diminish the number of extra words being used during the liturgy. Similarly, a number of parishioners asked for the song numbers to be posted so they could be seen in addition to being announced because sometimes they cannot hear the announcement. On their surveys, the majority of parishioners said that the hymn numbers were clearly announced, but there were a few more than usual (13%) choosing "seldom" or "sometimes." Some parishioners requested that the numbers be announced and then the digits repeated; so, for instance, after hearing "number four hundred fifty-six" they would hear "number four - five - six."

Entrance and Recessional

While some parishioners complained that "we don't need to sing every verse of every song," some of the VE noticed that the entrance and recessional songs were always cut short. A four-verse song or hymn would be selected, but only two verses sung. For example, at the end of Mass on the solemnity of the Ascension, the priest and deacon began to leave the sanctuary during the first verse of a festive Easter hymn, and were already walking down the center aisle as the second verse began. Although it is not always necessary to sing every verse of every song, the parish might do well to examine this practice and choose shorter songs or better pace the procession or recession.

Music in General

Both parishioners and VE appreciated the good quality of the music at St. Francis of Assisi. Of 14 surveys from parish members under age 18, for example, 5 included music or singing among things in the liturgy that help them pray. This remained true for all age levels. "Music is appropriate and engaging to a wide variety of ages," said a parishioner in her 30's, while another in over age 60 said, "Music under Paula's direction has added greatly to making Mass a prayerful experience."

Visitors commended the "very fine music ministry," "excellent music ministry." "I think it's the music that is holding this community together and bringing them back each week." "I was amazed at how well they sang." On the various music ministers, one VE summed up his opinion this way: "Overall, they were well prepared and led the assembly well in their singing. They added much to the beauty of sung prayer." Another credited the leadership, "It is clear that the music director has worked very hard in training the musicians. There is a very good quality of musical leadership. It's clear that the assembly has been formed well since they sing very well."

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Expand the parish's repertoire beyond the contemporary style and include other genres, such as traditional hymns. This not only broadens the music, but allows texts with a deeper theological content and increases the options for texts more suited to liturgical feasts and seasons.
2. List the song numbers on a hymn board in addition to announcing them more concisely. Consider making a weekly worship aid (program) which would not only eliminate the need for a verbal announcement but would also permit a wider choice of music.
3. When possible, sing all the verses in the entrance and recessional.
4. Consider using a resource in addition to *Breaking Bread*, or providing a program each week.
5. Direct the assembly's singing with hand gestures only when necessary.
6. Reconsider the practice of having the cantors and accompanist bow to the altar when they approach the ambo. Liturgical directives call for a bow to the altar when passing in front of it, not merely coming near it.

III. THE INDIVIDUAL PARTS OF THE MASS

Before Mass

A few of Masses attended by the VE began with a rehearsal of music. In the opinion of at least one of the V, this rehearsal was not really necessary. It involved practicing part of a responsorial psalm which the Visitor thought the choir and cantor could have assisted the assembly to do without rehearsing beforehand.

Many parishioners objected not to the rehearsals themselves, but to the time at which they are often begun. Among the write-in comments, parishioners of all ages, including some under 18 and 18-24, complained that music practice is conducted at the time Mass is scheduled to begin. This comment by a young woman age 18 to 24 captures what many older parishioners also said: "Mass should always start on time. No singing practice when Mass should start."

INTRODUCTORY RITES

Entrance Procession

Beginning from the back of the church, the entrance procession was considered by most of the VE to dignified (8 of 11) as well as prayerful and reverent (8 of 11). With the exception of Pentecost, when there was a baptism at the 11:00 Mass and the beginning of Mass was rather disorganized, the procession was considered by the VE to be orderly (10 of 11).

A parish practice that many of the VE questioned concerns the inclusion of the Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion in the entrance procession. Although it does not specifically prohibit them, the General Instruction of the Roman Missal does not mention Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion among the ministers in the entrance.²² The parish might want to think about and reassess their reasons for doing this.

Sometimes members of the entrance procession did not sing as they walked in procession. This was true of many of the Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, and some others, including Fr. Gaeke. When the assembly is singing an important part such as the entrance hymn²³, it seems inappropriate that members who are very visible as they process not join the rest of the assembly in singing. Since the function of the introductory rites in general and the entrance song in particular is to bring about unity among the worshipping assembly, all should sing.

²² GIRM 120 mentions these, other than the priest and deacon: thurifer (if incense is used), ministers with candles and cross, other acolytes, and reader.

²³ See GIRM 40 on the importance in general of singing at Mass, and 46 on the purpose of the introductory rites as "establishing communion." See GIRM 47 on the entrance song as uniting the assembly.

Other Elements of the Introductory Rites

The presider's greeting and introductory remarks followed the rubrics and were offered in a way that made people feel welcome, according to most of the VE.²⁴ The Penitential Act was chanted on several occasions, which added to the sense of prayerfulness and the solemnity of the Easter Season. The option of the Sprinkling Rite was not used, however, which would have been appropriate during any Sunday of the Easter Season and especially on the occasion of First Communion to highlight the connection of first communion and baptism.²⁵

The Gloria was always sung and never recited when the VE attended Mass at St. Francis, which would be commendable any Sunday since the Gloria is a hymn, but especially suitable for the Easter Season. At all of the Masses at which he presided, Fr. Schmidt rightly conveyed the dignity of the Mass and the Easter Season by chanting the collect.²⁶

Overall, one of the VE judged that the Introductory Rites "began the liturgy with good spirit and enthusiasm."

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Only have rehearsal of music before Mass when necessary.
2. Start Mass on time. If a rehearsal or announcement must precede Mass, make sure to do these before the time Mass is scheduled.
3. Consider not having the Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion in the entrance procession.
4. Set the standard that all those in the entrance procession sing the hymn as they process. Ensure that all who are not carrying an object as a candle or the gospel book have a hymnal or worship aid with which to sing the entrance hymn.
5. Work on better organizing the entrance when a baptism is celebrated at Mass.
6. Consider using the option of the Sprinkling Rite during the Easter Season, especially when celebrating rites such as first communion.

²⁴ One of the VE who attended two Masses with Fr. Gaeke found it very difficult to hear what he was saying at the beginning of Mass.

²⁵ See GIRM 51: "From time to time on Sundays, especially in Easter Time, instead of the customary Penitential Act, the blessing and sprinkling of water may take place as a reminder of Baptism."

²⁶ In contrast, one of the VE who attended two Masses with Fr. Gaeke thought that "there was little effort put into the proclamation of either the penitential tropes or the Collect."

1.

LITURGY OF THE WORD

During the Masses attended by the V, the Lectionary and the Gospel Book were treated with dignity and respect. The readings were proclaimed from the proper liturgical books, the Lectionary and Gospel Book, and not from some other source such as a missalette.

Silence after the Readings

An area of improvement that St. Francis parish should address concerns observing silence after the readings in the Liturgy of the Word. Both the Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass and the General Instruction of the Roman Missal emphasize the important role of silence in the Liturgy of the Word.²⁷ These documents encourage that time be given for silent reflection after the first and second readings as well as after the homily so that everyone can “meditate briefly on what they have heard.”²⁸

At the Masses attended by the V, there were only a few seconds of silence after the readings, if any at all, but most of the VE thought these were much too brief to accomplish their purpose as given by the General Instruction. Rather than the unhurried pace that allows for meditation that is envisioned by church documents, there is a sense of rushing or haste at St. Francis. It seemed to some of the VE that the very short pauses after the first and second readings served only to allow the lector to walk away or the musicians to get into place for the psalm or gospel acclamation, instead of a stillness observed by all for common meditation on the word of God.²⁹

Responsorial Psalm

The Responsorial Psalm was sung in its entirety at all the Masses observed by the V, as the General Instruction and Introduction to the Lectionary direct,³⁰ with the refrain sung by the assembly and the cantor singing the verses.

The psalm of the day given in the Lectionary for Mass was used most of the time. In order to promote singing of the responsorial psalm, the General Instruction gives the option of replacing the appointed psalm with another psalm in the Lectionary chosen for the season.³¹ Utilizing this option may have been the intent on the Fifth and Sixth Sundays of Easter, but instead of Psalm 118 which the Lectionary offers for the Easter Season, a paraphrase was used. On those Sundays, Christopher Walker's "This Day Was

²⁷ GIRM 56: “The Liturgy of the Word is to be celebrated in such a way as to favor meditation, and so any kind of haste such as hinders recollection is clearly to be avoided.” This is taken from LMI 28. For silence in the Mass in general, see GIRM 45.

²⁸ GIRM 45

²⁹ One of the VE timed the pause after the second reading at a mere 6 seconds.

³⁰ GIRM 61: “It is preferable for the Responsorial Psalm to be sung.” LMI 20: “As a rule the responsorial psalm should be sung.”

³¹ GIRM 61: “However, in order that the people may be able to sing the Psalm response more easily, texts of some responses and Psalms have been chosen for the different times of the year or for the different categories of Saints. These may be used instead of the text corresponding to the reading whenever the Psalm is sung.”

Made by the Lord," which is "based on" Psalm 118, was sung rather than the psalm itself from the Bible. Besides being a paraphrase, this composition also has various points in the verses which the assembly sings in addition to singing the response, instead of the customary simpler pattern of the cantor singing the verses and assembly the response.

One of the VE questioned the practice of having the cantor announce the number in the worship aid for the responsorial psalm. If the psalms in the Lectionary are used, the response is usually short enough for the congregation to repeat after hearing it, without having to read it. Eliminating the announcement would allow for the silent reflection after the reading to flow into the singing of the psalm, continuing the community's meditation on the word of God,³² in addition to the benefit of reducing the amount of extra words inserted into the liturgy.

Gospel Acclamation and Gospel

As the General Instruction of the Roman Missal calls for, the gospel acclamation was sung and not recited at every Mass attended by the VE. The verse of the acclamation was also sung most of the time, but on a couple of occasions it was omitted. The Gospel Book was used at almost all the Masses, and treated with dignity and respect. Incense honored the Gospel Book on the solemnities.

Some of the VE recommended revising the way the Gospel Book is handled during the acclamation. Instead of a procession with the Book from the altar to the ambo, the practice at St. Francis makes it seem that the purpose is to show the Book to the assembly, with the deacon turning around to display the Book to all sides of the church. "There should be a real Gospel Procession to the ambo," said one of the V, "and not have the deacon stand there in the middle of the sanctuary and just turn left and right."

At a few of the Masses attended by the V, including some of the first communion Masses, all of the people were asked to "sign" the Alleluia with hand gestures. At some of these Masses, there was a signer to assist the deaf members of the assembly who sat together near the front, and it was clear that the deaf appreciated this.³³ One of the VE commended the parish for this effort at use of another language to inculturate the liturgy.

Homily

The homily was preached by the priest at all but one of the Masses attended by the V, and most of the time (8 Masses, 4 evaluators) the homilist heard by the VE was Fr. Schmidt.

Regarding these eight homilies, the VE chose the following descriptors. Most (6 of 8) found the homily easy to understand. Half said the homily was thought-provoking, and three each said the homily was based on the readings, on the liturgy, or on a rite being celebrated (first communion). None selected "boring." Five of the homilies were thought to be too long.

³² see GIRM 61; the psalm "fosters meditation on the word of God."

³³ They began to clap afterwards in appreciation, and the pastor made a brief comment on this.

On Pentecost, Fr. Schmidt talked about immigration and the role of the Holy Spirit to preserve unity. He was commended by the VE for challenging the assembly to carefully consider immigration in our country. Another VE commended him for a mystagogical homily on the Sixth Sunday of Easter, in which he linked the saying of Jesus in the gospel ("Peace be with you") with the sign of peace at Mass, opening up the depth of the sign offered at Mass as not a mere hello but Christ's peace.

Some of Fr. Schmidt's homilies, however, contained too many ideas. The VE considered the content to be basically good, but thought that the homilies could have been better organized to help the parts flow from one to the next. One recommended writing out the homily or using note cards in order to connect all the ideas.

In contrast, others suggested omitting some of the content for more focused preaching. At a first communion Mass, for instance, one of the VE thought Fr. Schmidt tried to do too much in a rather rambling homily, speaking to the children and asking them questions, then incorporating some of his homily from the earlier Mass for the adults, and then speaking to the children again. Another VE at a first communion Mass had a similar opinion: "Fr. Tom is an excellent preacher. His comments to the first communicants and their families were good, but he definitely talked too long, trying to talk about the gospel and first communion."

Only one of the VE heard Fr. Gaeke preach, on two occasions. One of these homilies was only 2-3 minutes long, which the VE thought was too short. Fr. Gaeke's homilies were based on the readings, but because of the problems with the sound system, it was very difficult to hear and understand what he was saying. One week Fr. Gaeke moved back and forth in the sanctuary area as he preached, while the following week he remained at the ambo, a practice the VE recommends.

Profession of Faith

The Profession of Faith followed the homily as it should on Sundays. About half of the time the parish took advantage of the new option in the Roman Missal and recited the Apostles' Creed. A few of the VE commended the assembly for their strong participation in reciting the Creed.

General Intercessions

The general intercessions were read by the deacon when a deacon was present (6 of the 11 Masses observed), as the General Instruction indicates. At the other Masses the intercessions were read by a commentator or one of the lectors. The VE thought all these ministers read clearly and about two-thirds read with expression. (Those who did not read with expression were the three lectors.)

At one Mass (11:00 on Trinity Sunday), the person who read the intercessions was also the drummer with the musicians. The VE found this rather odd, and recommend instead that one of the lectors carry out this role.

Some of the VE noted again the difficulty in hearing the intercessions as well as the introduction and concluding prayer by the priest, whether due to the sound system in general or to the microphones used by the priest and deacon.

Regarding the content of the intercessions, the VE considered them to be universal, petitionary, and clear in content. For the most part, the VE thought they were clear in style and well-written (8 of 11). A couple of times, the content of the intercessions seemed more like an announcement, such as giving the date and time of an upcoming funeral. Notices like this should be given in the bulletin rather than within the general intercessions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. After the first two readings and the homily, observe a period of silent reflection in which no one is moving. Begin by adding small increments of time so the assembly can gradually grow accustomed to it and use the time to meditate on what they have heard from the word of God.
2. Sing the biblical text of the psalm as given in the Lectionary, whether the psalm assigned to the day or the options in the Lectionary's Common Texts for Sung Responsorial Psalms, without resorting to paraphrased texts.
3. Do not interrupt the flow of the liturgy by announcing a number for the responsorial psalm.
4. Do not omit the verse in the gospel acclamation.
5. Process with the Gospel Book during the acclamation from the altar to the ambo, instead of merely showing the book to the assembly.
6. Aim for homilies to be around 8 minutes long.

LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

Preparation of the Altar and Gifts

The collection taken up expediently with people passing baskets to each other assisted by the ushers. Only the bread, wine, and collection were included in the procession with the gifts, and these were presented at the same time by members of the assembly led by an usher to the altar.

The music during the preparation of the gifts was considered by the VE to be appropriate about half of the time. Some of the VE questioned why certain pieces were selected for this part of the Mass, since they seemed to have little to do with the liturgical action or with the liturgical day. For instance, "Sacred Silence" did not seem related to preparing the altar and gifts, nor did "Now We Remain" or "We Have Been Told" seem expressive of the mysteries of Ascension or Pentecost.³⁴

As is fitting for a solemnity, incense was used to honor the gifts and the assembly on Ascension and Pentecost.

The music for the Preparation of the Gifts ended as the priest finished washing his hands about half of the time. Sometimes the musicians stopped playing sooner and the preparatory prayers were said aloud by the priest with the people responding, "Blessed be God forever." On one occasion music was resumed after this with an instrumental played while congregation was being incensed, but on another (8:30 on Pentecost) no music accompanied the incensation of the gifts, altar, and assembly, which did not seem apt for a festive day.

Fr. Schmidt was commended by the VE for occasionally chanting the prayer over the gifts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Choose music related to the liturgical action of preparing the altar and gifts or to the season or day, especially on solemnities, when possible.
2. Choose music that will cover the whole action of the preparation of the gifts. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal intends that the preparatory prayers be said quietly and only said aloud when there has been no song or music played during the preparation.³⁵

³⁴ As mentioned above in the section in Part I on Music Ministry, "contemporary" church music is very limited when it comes to pieces for specific feasts or solemnities. Traditional hymn texts would offer a much wider selection for solemnities like Ascension or Pentecost.

³⁵ See GIRM 141-142.

Eucharistic Prayer

For the Masses attended by the V, the priest always recited rather than chanted the Eucharistic Prayer, but on three occasions, Fr. Schmidt did well to chant the preface. Both priests chanted the words, "The mystery of faith," and Fr. Schmidt also chanted the doxology.

The acclamations by the people were always sung, and the assemblies sang these with full voice, according to most of the VE. Some VE particularly noted how well the assembly participated in these acclamations. At one Mass, the Memorial Acclamation seemed unfamiliar to many of the people, and few were holding the booklets that contain the words and music for these acclamations.

Asked whether the assembly appear to be engaged in the Eucharistic Prayer by listening attentively, 6 of VE replied "yes" while 5 said "somewhat." One VE noted that she saw very few people reading along in the missalettes, but another VE had the opposite experience, with most of those near him following along instead of listening to the prayer.

A VE who attended Mass with Fr. Gaeke thought that he prayed Eucharistic Prayer III with little energy or conviction, and did not convey well the different parts of the prayer. He also noted that Fr. Gaeke holds the host and chalice no higher at the doxology than at the institution narrative. The Roman Missal and General Instruction distinguish between these: at the doxology, the priest is to "elevate" the host and chalice while at the institution narrative he "shows" each to the people.³⁶

Another VE who attended Mass with Fr. Schmidt thought that "this part of the liturgy dragged a bit," and recommended that Fr. Schmidt try chanting the Eucharistic Prayer. "He chants so well that it might help the flow of the Eucharistic Prayer more."

At the first communion Masses, the first communicants, invited to come up to "God's altar of praise," walked forward and stood in two lines on each side of the altar during the Eucharistic Prayer. Although the children were very attentive and not a distraction, one of the VE noted that the rubrics for Mass do not actually allow for this.³⁷

Another VE who experienced this agreed that the children behaved well but found the teachers distracting. Several teachers were vested and acted as M.C.'s for the Mass; they stood on a lower step behind the children, and sometimes corrected the children's behavior or moved them slightly. They had to step up to speak to or gesture to the children, and their movement was much more noticeable than anything the children were doing.

³⁶ See Roman Missal, Order of Mass, n. 110-111 and 114, for example, for Eucharistic Prayer III, and GIRM 151.

³⁷ One VE thought that it seemed odd to have the children be near the altar for the Eucharistic Prayer, but then return to their seats briefly only to come back toward the altar a few minutes later to receive communion.

With the children so visible during the Eucharistic Prayer, it would be good if they were clearly singing the prayer's acclamations, but it did not appear to one of the VE that they sang the memorial acclamation. They did, however, make a nice deep bow after the Institution Narrative, as the General Instruction calls for those standing during the prayer.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Encourage the priests to offer the Eucharistic Prayer with expression and conviction, and to occasionally chant the prayer.
2. Reconsider the practice of having the first communicants stand alongside the altar.

Communion Rite

The invitation to offer a sign of peace was given by the deacon, as is his role, at all the Masses when a deacon was present, and the assembly willingly offered the sign of peace to one another. A few of VE commented on the very friendly nature of the parish. As the new General Instruction directs, the presider and deacon offered the sign of peace only to those nearest them, so that the time it took the presider and deacon to offer the sign of peace was not longer than the time for the assembly. At the Mass with a baptism, the priest appropriately extended the sign of peace to the families of the baptized.

Most of the VE thought that the breaking of the bread was done in a manner that signified its importance in the Mass, and all the VE said that the litany during the breaking of the bread fully covered the action. Tropes other than the words "Lamb of God" were sometimes used; Rome has recently asked that this no longer be done.

Hosts were brought from the tabernacle and added to those just consecrated, at all the Masses attended by the VE. This practice goes against the wishes of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal n. 85:

It is most desirable that the faithful, just as the Priest himself is bound to do, receive the Lord's Body from hosts consecrated at the same Mass..., so that even by means of the signs Communion may stand out more clearly as a participation in the sacrifice actually being celebrated.

Although this norm recognizes that there may be times when it is necessary to give the faithful hosts previously consecrated, the practice is discouraged. Communion is meant to come from the altar, from hosts that the assembly brought to the altar at the preparation of the gifts and offered to God in the Eucharistic Prayer,³⁸ which God has transformed and now offers back to the assembly as the Body and

³⁸ On the role of the faithful in offering, see GIRM 79: "The meaning of this [Eucharistic] Prayer is that the *whole congregation of the faithful* joins with Christ in confessing the great deeds of God and in the *offering of Sacrifice*" (emphasis added).

Blood of Christ. This dynamic of giving and receiving "as a participation in the sacrifice actually being celebrated" is lost when the faithful do not receive, as the priest must, hosts consecrated at that Mass.

When he offered the invitation to communion, one of the VE noted that Fr. Schmidt inserted quite a number of additional words to the given liturgical formula.

Procedures for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion

The Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion were well-prepared and well-rehearsed, according to most of the VE.³⁹ In accord with church directives, they received communion themselves prior to distributing holy communion to the rest of the assembly, and were each handed a communion vessel from the altar by a priest or deacon. The V, however, questioned some of the procedures in place at St Francis for the Extraordinary Ministers.

The Extraordinary Ministers gather at the back of the church and then process together down the main aisle to the sanctuary, a custom that many of the VE found odd. There is nothing in the rubrics or General Instruction that would indicate that a procession of ministers occurs at this point. Perhaps they meet at the back in order to use the hand sanitizer provided there; if so, some other way to make the sanitizer available could be arranged, without making it seem like a part of the liturgy.

In addition, the distribution of communion to the Extraordinary Ministers seemed very tedious and time-consuming to some of the VE. They suggested that this process be streamlined and made simpler. For example, the priest could give communion to a few extraordinary ministers and then those ministers could serve communion to the other extraordinary ministers.

Communion from the Cup

When asked if enough bread and wine was consecrated to feed the entire assembly, almost all the VE replied no. The Precious Blood was offered to the assembly at all the Masses attended by the V, or at least offered to *some* of the assembly, since the amount of Precious Blood was adequate for the assembly at only 4 of 11 Masses. At the other 7 Masses, the consecrated wine was gone before all had the opportunity to receive.

In addition to increasing the amount of wine consecrated so that all who wish to receive communion from the cup may do so, St. Francis also needs to increase the number of cups provided for the assembly's communion. Many of the VE noticed long lines waiting to receive the Precious Blood, up to 6-8 people. One VE observed only 5 cups for a full church. Sometimes there was only one cup minister on a corner serving two sections at once. At a 5:00 Mass, the cup for an area was empty before even half of that section had processed forward. At most, there was only one cup provided for each paten with hosts, in contrast to the usual rule-of-thumb of two cups per paten.

³⁹ One VE thought that some were dressed too casually at the vigil Mass on a Saturday.

While not the majority of the congregation, a good number of people opted to receive communion from the cup. Some VE estimated it to be as many as half of the assembly, while others judged it to be somewhat less than half. But given the few cups offered and the long lines at those limited stations, many of the VE felt that the parish makes it difficult to exercise this option and speculated that more people might choose to receive the Lord's Blood if enough were made available for them.

Obviously, if the number of cups is increased, the parish would need more Extraordinary Ministers and more communion stations. A greater number of Extraordinary Ministers would then necessitate even more so the streamlining of their reception of communion.

It seems noteworthy that, when asked on the parishioner survey what pleases him about the liturgy at St. Francis, what came to one person's mind was his appreciation of the opportunity to receive communion under both species at every Mass (married man, 40's).

Communion Hymn

In general, most of the VE thought the communion hymn reflected sound liturgical and theological principles, at least somewhat. Some questioned why certain songs were selected, such the choice of "Rain Down" and its application to the communion rite, or whether something more suitable than "Be Not Afraid" could be found for the Ascension. All of the VE thought that the assembly was able to participate in the singing of the communion hymn, with one VE adding, "For the most part I thought the Communion procession went very well. People were reverent when taking the consecrated bread and cup while, at the same time, singing."

The communion hymn began after the priest's communion, sometimes with a long introduction on the piano covering the communion by the Extraordinary Ministers. One VE noted that the song number was announced only after this long introduction so that, while the song technically began while the ministers received, it felt like the song began *after* the number was announced. The concern here is that the communion song is meant to begin when the first members of the assembly receive (priest and Extraordinary Ministers) and continue until all have received. Sometimes the song stopped before all had come to communion, with the choir singing another song at that point.

At one first communion Mass in April, the "Ave Maria" was sung after communion had finished, which seemed inappropriate to the VE present for that point in the Mass. It was not clear why this was done.

Purifying the Vessels

The communion vessels were purified immediately following Communion at the credence table. At some Masses, while the deacon purified the vessels, the priest stood at the chair and watched him. Some of the VE who observed this encourage the priest to sit down and let all reflect on the mystery of having received communion, and not draw attention to the purification or to taking the remaining hosts to the tabernacle.

Silent Prayer and the Prayer after Communion

Only 4 of the VE could say that a period of silent prayer followed the Communion procession, with 7 saying this existed only somewhat. Often, the people knelt while the priest stood watching the deacon purify the communion vessels, only sitting when the deacon finished and took his seat. The sitting in silence then only lasted a few seconds, however. "Very little time was given for the assembly to sit and reflect on the sacred mysteries just received," said one of the VE.

The Prayer after Communion was recited from the presider's chair, with Fr. Schmidt chanting the prayer on at least two occasions.

Communion for the Sick

At some Masses, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion were invited to come forward to receive pyxes to bring communion to the sick. They then appropriately processed out in the closing procession.

Distribution of Communion at the First Communion Mass

At a first communion Mass, one of the VE questioned the procedure for distribution of communion. All the first communion children and their families were offered communion first, and no one in other sections of the church could go to communion until all of the first communion families were finished. In addition, the pastor was the only minister offering hosts to the children and families, and this he did to only one side of the main aisle at a time. Only the priest and one cup minister were occupied, while all the others stood in place and waited for a long time. Several times, the line backed up so that not even the priest was giving communion. At one point when the pastor was standing there waiting for a family to come forward, a family on the opposite side stood up but they were told by an MC to wait until the initial side being served had finished. Then finally the second side was invited forward, while the rest of the assembly continued to wait and watch and sing.

Needless to say, this took a very long time. The communion song that day was "I Am the Bread of Life," a song with five verses and a refrain. Giving communion to the first communicants and families took the whole song with all its five verses as well as three instrumental verses with the refrain repeated between each. The entire song was then repeated, this time adding two instrumental verses, followed by a choir piece to cover the communion of the rest of the assembly. While minutes elapsed were not recorded by the V, when over 15 verses of the song were not enough to cover communion, the rite is too prolonged. (This 11:00 Mass was not over until nearly 12:45.)

It does not seem clear why the rest of the assembly must wait. "Communion" is about "union," about eating and drinking the Lord's Body and Blood together as one Body in Christ. Also, even if the first communicants receive hosts from a priest, perhaps another priest could assist and another minister could serve the hosts to the family members. At the least, both sides of the aisle could come forward to the priest, so he is not waiting after each person.

Overall

In general, some of the VE commended the parish for the way they conducted the communion rite. "It was well done and reverent," said one, while another added, "Very fine communion rite."

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Make a concerted effort to offer the assembly hosts consecrated at that Mass. Only use hosts from the tabernacle when necessary.
2. Increase the amount of wine that is consecrated so all have the opportunity to receive the Blood of Christ if they choose.
3. Add more communion stations for cups. Offer two stations with cups for every station with hosts.
4. Streamline the procedure for the reception of communion by the Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion so this remains reverent but is not unduly prolonged.
5. Have the priest sit down following the distribution of communion if a deacon is present and purifying the vessels.
6. Allow a period of silent prayer for all after the reception of communion.
7. Select communion hymns more carefully or broaden the repertoire so that text corresponds more closely to the mystery of communion or to the liturgical day or season.
8. Avoid using tropes other than "Lamb of God" in the litany for the breaking of the bread.
9. Limit the number of additional words inserted into the liturgy, e.g. at the invitation to communion.
10. Come up with a different plan for the distribution of first communion that is less time-consuming.

CONCLUDING RITES

Announcements

Announcements were appropriately made after the Communion Rite was completed with the Prayer after Communion, as part of the Concluding Rites. When asked if the announcements were clear, to the point, and not too many in number, only a few of the VE could answer yes. At several Masses, the assembly was asked to be seated because of the length and number of announcements. A few of VE heard groans or sighs from the assembly at this request.

Apparently this is a common occurrence. The pastor even joked about it during his homilies one weekend. That weekend happened to have a first communion Mass, and despite the joke, he went on for quite a while at the announcements thanking all sorts of people involved with the first communion. He had all the parents stand and the assembly applauded. The teachers were recognized. Then he thanked each of the MC's for the Mass (at least four people) and they were applauded, individually. Visitors from out of town were thanked. At this point Mass had been going on for well over 1 1/2 hours.

Sometimes, besides the person reading the announcements, another person would come forward to give a particular message. One even wore a costume to invite everyone to come to the Vacation Bible School this summer. She was quite engaging with lots of drama and energy, and when she finished everyone applauded her for her "performance." Another day a speaker talked at some length, after three already rather long announcements, inviting people to and explaining about a Pentecost event the following week with ethnic food. She also did a good job and was funny in her approach, but Mass was already over an hour long when she began.

Like so many other parts of the Mass at St. Francis, some of the VE found the announcements hard to hear.

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal does include announcements in the Concluding Rites as a part of the Mass. However, it describes these as "brief" and only to be done when necessary.⁴⁰

A number of parishioners complained about the number and length of announcements at St. Francis liturgies. They asked that announcements be given in the bulletin and not be made verbally unless they are very important. "Why print a bulletin," some asked, "if you are going to read it at the end of Mass?"

Blessing and Dismissal

On some Sundays in the Easter Season, the priest or deacon chanted the Easter dismissal at the conclusion of Mass, a practice the VE commended. On the Saturday before Mothers' Day, Fr. Gaeke included a blessing for mothers, but no mention was made of it and the VE wondered if anyone noticed. Sometimes Fr. Gaeke did some closing remarks and the dismissal from the altar rather than the chair,

⁴⁰ GIRM 90

which would have been more appropriate. At one Mass, the microphone kept going in and out every few words during the blessing, which greatly disrupted any prayerful quality of that rite.

The recessional was sung and was usually of a reasonable length, although several VE noted that this hymn was sometimes cut short, only singing, for instance, two verses of short four-verse hymn. Sometimes the procession left as soon as the final song began. At a few Masses, Fr. Gaeke left during the first verse, with neither the deacon nor him carrying a hymnal or singing.

Most members of the assembly remained for the closing hymn, in the observation of about half of the VE. There were a number of people, mainly in the back, who left at communion time, especially at the Saturday vigil Mass. When Fr. Gaeke and the deacon left during the first verse of the hymn, other members of the assembly left as well. At a first communion Mass that lasted an hour and 50 minutes, many people, who had been checking their watches the last ten minutes or so, left as soon as the words of dismissal were sung.

A spirit of fellowship among members of the assembly was observed by all the VE as the people left church. Lots of friendly conversations took place around the church and the gathering space as many people stayed around to chat and visit with one another. One VE described a joyful spirit among the community, while another said, "People left in great enthusiasm!" "It seems to be a very friendly parish," observed one of the V, "where people enjoy each other's company." Even with all the conversations, about two-thirds of parishioners feel there is an opportunity to remain in church and pray all or most of the time.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Limit the number and length of verbal announcements at the end of Mass.
2. Begin the exit procession during the last verse of the hymn.
3. Encourage all members of the procession who are not carrying something to hold a hymnal and sing with the rest of the assembly.

IV. OTHER CONCERNS

LENGTH OF MASS

A significant issue that St. Francis of Assisi parish should address as a result of this evaluation process is the length of Mass. Both the VE and a large number of parishioners think the Mass at St. Francis is too long.

How long is Sunday Mass at St. Francis? When the VE attended Mass, the time of Mass ranged from an hour ten minutes to an hour and 50 minutes. While the longest Masses for the VE included first communion, parishioners testify that Masses of this length are not unusual. On the survey, one parishioner described Masses as typically lasting 75-90 minutes, while another estimated 1 hour 20 minutes to 1 hour 45 minutes. On the day she filled out the survey, a woman said that 8:30 Mass had lasted 90 minutes. An older parishioner noted that the homily is often 20 minutes and communion takes 20 minutes.

Repeatedly on their surveys, when asked what they would like to see improved in their parish liturgy, parishioners of all age groups list the length of Mass. One person, age 31-40, mentions that Mass is too long five times in various comments on the survey's last page. A married woman in her fifties and a young person under age 18 both made this statement: "The length of Mass has made me not want to become involved in this parish."

A parishioner over 60 takes a pragmatic step when his time is limited: "I go, when I need to, to another parish because the Mass there is one hour." While this is an occasional remedy for him, many others are considering it as a more permanent solution.

For a number of parishioners, the extended length of Mass is causing them to think about joining another parish. A married woman in her forties said, "We struggle whether we should remain parishioners here." "We have started to explore other parishes," said a man in his fifties. Another married man in his fifties said the same. "We are considering transferring parishes and have started attending other parishes to see their Mass, such as Incarnation. ... We have been parishioners at St. Francis in excess of 15 years and we do see quite a few former St. Francis parishioners at Incarnation."

But those leaving are not only the forty- and fifty-year-olds. Several parishioners in their thirties cite the length of Mass as something to improve at St. Francis, and some of this age group attribute the loss of young members to the long Masses. "Please keep Mass at one hour length. People are choosing other parishes for this reason. We are losing our community of younger families." Given the disproportionate number of survey responses from older parishioners and the very small number from younger ones, perhaps it may be that many younger members have already left.

The reason for wanting a shorter Mass is not merely to get their obligation over with more quickly. The concern is, rather, pastoral. Several parishioners expressed concern that children are becoming alienated from the church by Masses that last well over an hour. "If I were single, no kids, I would not

mind a service that runs 15-30 minutes late. But I do have kids. I worry that they are developing a very negative opinion of Mass," said a married man, age 41-50, with three children at home, two of whom are teens.

Some framed the desire for a more reasonable time for Mass as a matter of respect for parish members. "We need to be more respectful of people's time. Mass doesn't always need to be an hour on the dot, but to consistently run really long (1 hour 20 minutes to 1 hour 45 minutes) shows a disregard for our fellow church-goers."

Below are several recommendations from the VE, many already mentioned in this report, for ways to address the undue length of Sunday Mass at St. Francis of Assisi. It is essential to give time to what is important in the celebration of Mass, so, for instance, concern about a prolonged liturgy should never be a reason to eliminate silent reflection after the readings and after communion.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Begin the Mass on time. Any announcements or music rehearsals should begin *before* the time appointed for Mass.
2. Limit the additional words inserted into the liturgy.
3. Contain the homily to about 8 minutes in length.
4. Devise a simpler and less time-consuming procedure for serving communion to the extraordinary ministers.
5. Limit the number and length of verbal announcements at the end of Mass. Consider doing any necessary verbal announcements a few minutes before Mass begins.
6. Be cautious about holding more than one special ceremony at the same Mass. For instance, a blessing and prayer for a couple celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary was done at the same Mass with first communion, which resulted in a Mass that was extremely long.

BAPTISM OF CHILDREN AT MASS

During the weeks in which the VE attended Mass at St. Francis, the rite of baptism of children was celebrated at a Pentecost Mass.

The families were included in the entrance procession, but there was a rather long gap in the procession between the acolytes with incense, cross, and candles, and the families. The VE who observed this Mass could not easily see the reason for this delay, and thought the procession appeared disorganized because of the long space in it.

The signing of the children with the cross and the giving of the name were done in the front of the church, with parents and babies standing facing the people. However, the Rite of Baptism of Children calls for these rituals to be done at the door to the church, as a sign of baptism as entrance into the church.

After the Liturgy of the Word, there was a gesture of laying on of hands in place of the anointing with the oil of catechumens and exorcism prayer. This part of the rite seems confused and not in accord with the church's ritual.

A very nice procession to the font out in the gathering space followed, with most of the assembly participating. The VE thought the flow of the liturgy was better here than in other parts, but still seemed somewhat disorganized. The VE commended Fr. Schmidt for the fine job he did in engaging the assembly.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Celebrate the first part of the rite of baptism at the door, as indicated in the ritual book.
2. Include the prayer of exorcism and anointing with the oil of catechumens.
3. Try to make the ritual flow in a more smooth manner. Perhaps have someone serve as an MC who can assist the families and the priest in movement from place to place and other practical aspects of the rite.

V. CONCLUSION

Specific recommendations appear at the end of each section in this report. Here, however, are some of the more significant areas of concern.

1. Improve or replace the sound system (see p. 6)
2. Reduce the length of Sunday Mass to about an hour (see p. 40).
3. Be judicious about inserting additional words into the liturgy.⁴¹
4. Allow for periods of silence where they are called for, especially after the readings (see p. 27).
5. Increase the number of cups for communion (see p. 34).
6. Offer a variety of styles of music besides the contemporary style (see p. 20).
7. Keep homilies shorter and more focused, at about 8 minutes in length.
8. Simplify the procedure for giving communion to the extraordinary ministers so that it takes less time and consider eliminating the procession of extraordinary ministers from the rear of the church (see p. 34).
9. Provide ongoing training and formation for liturgical ministers.
10. Consider the significance of the high percentage of surveys from parishioners over 50 years old, and the very few returned by parishioners under 50 (see p. 2-3).

St. Francis of Assisi Parish has much to commend it in its celebration of Sunday Mass as noted throughout this report, especially the strong participation by the whole assembly in speaking and singing and the liturgical ministry of both clergy and laity. It is our hope that attending to the recommendations offered here will draw the members of the parish even more deeply into the sanctifying worship of God.

Worship Office
Archdiocese of Cincinnati
Karen Kane, Director

Submitted by Emily Besl
September 2013

⁴¹ This concern appears throughout this report. In the words of one of the VE: "Perhaps the greatest challenge for St. Francis is the pace of the liturgy with extra words. The extra words seemed to make the liturgy drag..., not only the priest's extra words, but also announcement of hymns or rehearsal prior to the liturgy. Consider which words are most beneficial to the assembly. Be careful about adding words to the rite that aren't really allowed for."